

News Analysis

Losing the Fight Against Mexico's Jalisco Cartel

Details

Written by Jesus Perez

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[Mexico \(/mexico-organized-crime-news\)](#) [Jalisco Cartel \(/component/tags/tag/115-jalisco-cartel\)](#)



A firefighter at the site of a CJNG narco-blockade

Recent high-profile attacks in Mexico

(<http://www.insightcrime.org/component/tags/tag/9-mexico>)'s Jalisco state demonstrate the Jalisco Cartel's capacity for coordinated violence. Regardless of the eventual consequences, there are several points to consider in terms of the ability of Mexican authorities to combat this group.

The strength of the Jalisco Cartel - New Generation (CJNG), led by Nemesio Oseguera, alias "El Mencho," calls attention to the limits of the institutions tasked with combating it. The Mexican government is considered most vulnerable to organized crime groups at the local level ([/news-analysis/mayors-face-tough-decisions-in-mexicos-](#)

[embattled-pacific-region](#)), but weaknesses at both the state and federal level also create difficulties in responding to high-profile criminal groups.

The fact that federal operations like the Jalisco Operation "Operativo Jalisco" can trigger violence is not a new development. As with recent narco-blockades, CJNG carried out violence in 2012 (<http://mexico.cnn.com/nacional/2012/08/25/grupos-armados-queman-vehiculos-y-realizan-22-bloqueos-en-jalisco>) in response to the capture of the group's leaders, demonstrating a recurring strategy aimed at protecting leadership. With this pattern the group also marked its development and ability to use violence in a flexible and sensational manner ([/news-analysis/jalisco-cartel-evolved-mexico-war-drugs](#)).

Federal operations against CJNG often develop without state-level knowledge and coordination. This has sparked complaints (<http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=318183>) from Jalisco state authorities, including Governor Aristoteles Sandoval who has spoken out about the lack of federal government cooperation (<http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion-mexico/2015/relevan-policia-federal-y-municipal-en-jalisco-1098060.html>). This indicates that CJNG is growing in a scenario in which state authorities, who are most knowledgeable about the group, are not consulted by federal entities, who have the resources to implement stronger policies against CJNG.

Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto pursues this operational strategy to avoid leaks. According to reports more than 1,000 Jalisco officials are classified as "high risk" (<http://www.reporteindigo.com/reporte/guadalajara/el-cartel-que-enraizo-en-jalisco>) for possible links to organized crime groups, demonstrating the level of criminal infiltration in state institutions. Additionally, more than 100 public servants (<http://www.unionjalisco.mx/articulo/2015/04/09/seguridad/guadalajara/gobierno-de-sandoval-registra-102-homicidios-de-servidores>) have been killed during Sandoval's two years as governor.

The central government's difficulties in combating organized crime have resulted in the implementation of the Unified Regional Force (http://www.milenio.com/policia/Inicia-Fuerza-Unica-Regional-Jalisco_0_339566158.html) "Fuerza Unica Regional," a unified Jalisco state police force launched in mid-2014. The new force is part Peña Nieto's nationwide Unified Command ([/news-analysis/pena-nieto-proposal-municipal-police-reform-mexico](#)) "Mando Unico," initiative, aimed at stamping out municipal-level police corruption by solidifying each state's police command under a single statewide entity.

Nevertheless, the Unified Regional Force initiative may simply prove to be another institutional reshuffle that has to align itself with networks protecting organized crime. Groups with a large presence in the region, like CJNG, are likely to carry out attacks to demonstrate their capacity to reinforce existing pacts or demand broken deals be reinstated.

SEE ALSO: Jalisco Cartel Profile (/mexico-organized-crime-news/jalisco-cartel-new-generation)

There are also some disheartening facts. For example, the Unified Regional Force police reform is being directed by Jalisco's Attorney General's Office, an institution accused of past human rights abuses (<http://www.unionjalisco.mx/articulo/2014/12/11/gobierno/guadalajara/quejas-contr-fge-crecen-76-en-10-meses>). Additionally, reports have claimed state police are also providing protection to alleged criminals (<http://m.reporteindigo.com/nota.php?id=82592>). This would partially explain the federal government's secrecy in anti-CJNG operations.

Amidst this volatile situation, federal forces are obligated to show results. Sometimes, this consists of targeting criminal leaders, a policy which garners international support (/news-briefs/who-runs-mexico-jalisco-cartel), but is debated (/news-analysis/mexico-fugitive-drug-lords-organized-crime-strategy) due to the way it provides criminals with an incentive to violently resist capture.

Federal policies can also bring their own problems. For example, with federal support groups linked to CJNG (/news-analysis/new-criminal-players-in-mexico-embattled-michoacan-state) helped weaken criminal group the Knights Templar in Mexico (<http://www.insightcrime.org/component/tags/tag/9-mexico>)'s Pacific Michoacan state. However, this also helped strengthen CJNG. When tackling criminal groups, federal policies should take into account what other organizations lurk just outside the targeted group's territory in order to avoid unintended consequences.

In addition, while military responses (/news-briefs/mexico-selects-army-general-to-lead-operation-jalisco) benefit from a clear advantage in firepower over groups like CJNG, they lack grounds for launching criminal proceedings against the political and economic networks that feed organized crime.

This means a military response would probably be effective in capturing or killing "El Mencho," but neither the priorities nor objectives of a military operation coincide with launching a criminal investigation.

SEE ALSO: Mexico News and Profiles (/mexico-organized-crime-news)

The fact that federal authorities have intelligence information doesn't necessarily mean they also have a legal case. The latter requires prior long-term investigations.

The issue becomes even more difficult when taking some of Mexico (<http://www.insightcrime.org/component/tags/tag/9-mexico>)'s legal peculiarities into account. For example, a federal investigation can be launched into federal crimes, such as those linked to organized crime, while state authorities often concentrate on murder and kidnapping (<http://www.insightcrime.org/component/tags/tag/4-kidnapping>) investigations, which begin at the state level. As a result, government officials prioritize different aspects of a criminal group, with neither one having an accurate picture of complex organizations -- like CJNG -- as a whole.

Authorities also have the option of seeking quicker solutions like extraditing drug traffickers to the United States (<http://www.excelsior.com.mx/nacional/2015/05/05/1022536>). However, foreign courts and investigators are unlikely to look into criminal protection networks due to the difficulty of investigating from afar and the sensitive nature of investigating the institutions of neighboring countries.

In Mexico (<http://www.insightcrime.org/component/tags/tag/9-mexico>), organized crime groups like CJNG have the resources to take advantage of these factors. Their obvious superiority over municipal police, combined with weak state institutions and contradictory federal policies that prioritize militarized approaches translate into problems in the short and long term.

